

The first feature I'd like to show you, dpeg sviatko, is the SPELL-RIGHT 35,000 word dictionary. Type in a misspelled word and I'll beep when the error is. Then press the RETURN key to go on to the next feature.

I can also erase a whole word with a sing. Press the WORDERASER key once for each word to erase on this line. Again press RET

Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of his countrymen. One line memory correction. Cual pitch. Auto return, center. MOTLEY CRUE Auto return

life is a bitch, then you marry one

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SAY Vawter jkr. d no;w is the time for all good neb to lmeet their master. Nowq is the hour to go to eternitly. Do you agree Where do we go from here You tell me!

This is a pretty nice typewriter except my typing doesn't do it justice!

Lets just start over again! I sure like to type on this machine except its very sensitive.

JOB STORIES BY:

MIKE BAKER
JIM CLINEFELTER
TIM COATS
JEFF CURTIS
LINDA DAY
DENISE DEE
SEAN WOLF HILL
W. JOE HOPPE
ERIC MAYER
P.J.K.
RANDY RUSSELL
CAROL SCHNECK
TOM SHANNON



MIDNIGHT. October 22, 1987. I've been putting off writing MY job story for a year or so...just fragments.... Got great job stories from other people, but put off doing this AMERICAN JOB magazine for too long. One reason has been lack of money to print it because lack of jobs to make money. Hell though, it's time to do it. Finish the magazine and the money will come from somewhere. I felt like I came to the end of my rope (again) today, and in the last month because of working, quitting, and hunting for jobs I have written very little. So it's midnight and I expect to get this goddamn thing done by morning. No dragging it out or rewriting. I'm not going to worry about the dictionary or spelling or typing errors... so put up with it.... I've got to do this NOW or lose my mind. It's going to jump around a lot.... so here it goes....

LATE SUMMER 1987. Nothing ever changes it seems. Here I am living with my parents for the summer, looking for a job. Havn't heard from anyone. Had three interviews. Didn't want any job I've applied for. Will probably end up getting something I don't want, don't like. Minimum wage. Work awhile. Quit.

But this is the story of my last year--in Columbus Ohio--trying to get by, whatever, in terms of THE JOB. Moved there May 86 which was like my tenth anniversary of having jobs. I was optimistic--actually veiwing the job thing as FUN. Just moved back to Ohio from NYC where I worked nearly a year at the Strand Bookstore for nearly a year--nearly a year--one of my most fun jobs ever. Happy to be in Ohio--was telling a friend in NY how easy it was to get a job in Ohio and what kind of job I'd get. Maybe get a number of jobs--just for the experiences--never had any trouble finding jobs before....

Now, to make this a good story I should start from the end. Because I finally did find a job in Columbus that I was able to keep for seven months. It didn't drive me crazy though I didn't actually love it. I wanted for the sake of the story to end this job in some flamboyant manner--quit over one of their ridiculous rules--or be fired unjustly. Instead I was on very good terms with the bosses and even was a little sad when I left. They even sent a letter of recommendation with my final check. So--no good blow-out ending--that's OK--this is all true stuff.

OK--now back to June 1986. Beth and I have moved to Columbus and cleaned and painted our new apartment--time to start job hunting. I feel good about myself. I know in the story that follows I sound like a massive irresponsible lazy fuck-up, but really--in jobs I've had for any period of time I'm usually liked by the bosses and considered a hard worker and a responsible employee. I type up a good looking resume and happily and expectantly hit the job market....

(note: I tried to compile a list of all the jobs I applied for... but it's just impossible...but I'll include the more remarkable ones)

I GOT THE JOB AT THE INDIAN RESTAURANT pretty quick, and it was only a block away--and hell, an INDIAN restaurant! I quickly found out the owner, an Indian, was working on the American Dream and I was his new slave. Crawled around and picked nails out of his renovated office carpet before I even got to start washing the dishes--and then he complained at me for being behind and got irritated with me for not being done quick enough at the end of the night. The Indian chef was real cool and gave me a free meal, but did you ever try to get cury off metal dishes? My first night was my last. I could surely find something better....

LAZARUS DOWNTOWN always seemed cool, but going through the application process was a major ordeal. A whole booklet, a test, two interviews, and still a month went by, so when they called I took the job even though it was unloading furniture from trucks. It WAS pretty hard work, but generally OK, and some of the black guys I worked with were OK. I really liked the warehouse and freight elevator too. But then the bullshit started. Just a week into the job. Big meeting one day with manager and HER manager...lot of bullshit rules

no one would ever follow. Then later that very day big manager gets mad at us for being behind schedule. Does he not realize we have just spent two hours in a meeting? THEN he sees a footprint on a big white couch and he checks with all of our shoes to try to find the guilty one. I can deal with the whole organization being full of shit but this does it for me. I don't return for another day.

I apply for a job at a bookstore in Yuppie Village--wont use their real name because I respect small businesses--no matter how fucked. It looks good. I talk to the owner. We'll--see--in the meantime I apply to lots of other places. Lot of hotels, a carpet warehouse... bowling alleys... don't hear nothing....

I went to the offices of some kind of corporate center out there by the outerbelt--a real depressing region. The place looked like they were moving in. I filled out a real poorly made application--like they had made it on their worst copier. I never had a chance to ask for it. The guy at the desk couldn't get off the phone, but he guessed what I was there for and just handed me the application.

Then I went into the back office to talk to the boss. He was young, too, maybe thirty, and casually dressed. He shook my hand like he wanted to break it, or send me over on my back. Like everyone else he asked me about my living in New York. He didn't look up when I said I just wanted to move there to see what it was like.

"Well Randy, what we have here is a very fast paced warehouse position. It'll be hard work. There will only be two of you. What we're looking for, Randy, is someone who is going to BUST HIS ASS. Do you think this person is you?"

"Sure, I think I can do it." Of course I say it very meekly like I always talk when I'm lying. How the fuck should I know if I can do the job? I hadn't done it yet.

"We want someone who's going to stick around too," he continued. "I don't want to train someone for two weeks and have them run off to New York." I felt like I was in the principal's office being scolded.

"Oh, I plan on staying around," I said, quietly again, like I always talk when defending myself when I don't feel I should have to defend myself.

"OK. Thanks, we're going to be taking applications for a couple of more days and then we'll call you."

Here's how it should have gone: "We're looking for someone who's gonna BUST HIS ASS. Do you think that person could be you, Randy?"

"Fuckin-A Steve. When do I start and how much?"

"We start at \$3.75 an hour but you can get a raise pretty fast..."

"You gotta be out of your fucking mind..." (Get up to leave)....

"Well, I'm sorry you feel that way."

"Well, I'M sorry you wasted my time, asshole."

THE THIRD SHIFT JOB always appealed to me for some damn reason. The LOBSTER shift. The GRAVEYARD shift. The ZOMBIE shift I named it after working a couple of days at this highly romanticized-no-more shift. 11:30 pm to seven am. Seven hour shift. 11:30 instead of a nice even hour like midnight so they could take a half hour lunch break whether you wanted it or not-- and not get paid for it. The only thing you could REALLY do with a 3:30 lunch break was try not to fall asleep. Can't really relax or rest or have a meal. No diners around. No employee cafeteria. No free coffee even. And they CALLED it a LUNCH break. I couldn't believe the audacity--3:30 in the morning--everyone just wants to space out and glide thru the rest of the night and get to seven. And here they say LUNCHTIME. We're 'giving' you a half hour for LUNCH--a half hour you don't get paid--even though you have to stay in this hellhole. Well, you can go to Whitecastle if you want but you have to punch out if you leave the premises. Premesis. White Castle. No thanks. And the breakroom is ten times worse than the warehouse.

But you cant stay in the warehouse. Theyre extra nice to us and "let us" go to the parking lot if we're good and dont throw any trash on the ground. But one person could ruin it for all of us. Fuck. Had I sleep-walked down to the recruiting station and accidentally enlisted in the fuckin army? Fuckin. Fuckin-A! That's exactly how one of the supervisors talks. Like he's Joe Army. Never smiles, all business, says what he has to say in short almost illiterate spurts.

Well I wasnt sure about going to this place at 11 pm on a Thursday night when I felt like sleeping and all, but since I didn't have another job prospect and the phone wasnt ringing and I was running out of patience hope and sanity, not to mention money, well I put a peanut butter sandwich and a banana in a bag and got in my car and drove to one of the many expressways. THIS was a good feeling--driving --in the car--at night. Real comfortable. I had on old work jeans and sweatshirt and work boots, saw insane latenightneon from the empty highway and then got on I-70 WEST. Looking for my exit. Then I got this strong urge to keep on going. West. West sounds so cool. Where would I end up. Maybe just go to Dayton. Anyway NOT to this horror JOB.

I got this job almost instantly the day before yesterday. Going around to this and that from the newspaper help wanted. Trying to do at least two a day. First went to this weird factory out by the airport by taking a road that actually went UNDER two runways--finally got to this weird compound in the middle of nowhere--the closest thing on the map was a suburb called WONDERLAND. Fill out application then take freeways all the way across town to maximum factory industrial zone right near the interstate and the outerbelt. Horrible dusty roads and huge tanks of who knows how dangerous what all over the place. Deadend weird factory road warehouse complex, big room with a table full of unhealthy looking people filling out applications. Fill out mine FAST to get OUT SOON--employees come by and look in the porthole window with great beards and crazy eyes. Wait my turn but know exactly what the lady would say--listening to other applicants. I have a job if I want it. She doesnt even look at the applications. Third shift. Start thursday. \$3.50 an hour. Temporary. I say OK--kind of excited about the third shift thing--though I know the job must be pretty horrible. Oh well, I can always write a story about it.

Few minutes early the first night--sit around tables and read the rules. Bullshit. As soon as I get there I think I walked into a John Waters movie. Well--I can always walk out the door--no one would care. Lot of young kids--talking about fighting--an older mother with her kids--she's huge and talking about getting drunk--a couple black man and wife couples--a psychotic ex-marine Vietnam vet--a couple great old guys with big bellies--some Roger Daltrey look-alikes and various other headbangers. There's one guy with a black pirate headband and mirrorsunglasses and a big knife on his belt. I dont figure he'll make it thru orientation--turns out he's a supervisor and actually the coolest nicest guy there. Really the only inspiration in the whole mess. The warehouse turns out to be huge, underlighted, and full of K-mart returned and damaged items. Our job is to move them around. I never do figure it out--we all just kind of fake it in a lethargic haze. We put things that are like in something called GAYLORDS -- I think-- they keep talking about these gaylords. I never figure if that's there correct word I'm hearing or what they are, but I let the time pass and be happy to be confused, relaxed, and soon off work. Morning is cool. I have breakfast at a diner and sleep a little, but the rest of the day is a nightmare haze.... But it's my only job.

AMAZINGLY THEY CALL ME FROM THE BOOKSTORE where I REALLY want to work and I quit my warehouse job. Picking up my final check is another adventure. The secretary wont tell me where to go and actually seems to hate me through the protective glass. I finally figure it out and when I pass here again I wave the check and smile real big "THANKS" and her look is the most evil Ive ever seen. The Bookstore is heaven by comparison--personal--pleasant--books. The relationship

between the three bosses confuses me though--they argue a lot and the one seems to think I shouldnt exist. I'm trying to do a good job, tho I kind of settle into my NYC bookstore work speed which means I take a bit of time to look at books. I'm obsessed with children's books and cant resist a little research. After all if you cant read a little on a bookstore job you may as well be working with auto parts. But I really like the job. I want to keep it. I decide it's my "last" job. I'll do anything to keep it --keep it until I don't have to ever work again or whatever. It's a good job. I get layed off just as suddenly as I got hired. Just not enough work they say. I dont even complain and start looking for something else.

~~~~~

I'm sitting in some weird corporate offices out in the middle of nowhere. Close to the outerbelt I guess. Real Hell land. I'm waiting for the cleaning man, the boss who might hire me to clean these offices in the evenings. But he hasn't showed up, and I've been here at least for a half hour. I always carry pens and some paper so when I get into situations like this I have something to do. So I'm not wasting my time. He's wasting my time - I'M not wasting my time.

AMERICAN JOB  
P&C December 1987  
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T.B.S. PUBLICATIONS  
5414 Columbus Ave.  
Sandusky, Ohio  
44870

some stories first  
appeared in  
Whitewall of Sound  
J.O.E.S. 6 1/2  
and Circular.

Thanks to everyone  
who wrote for this  
and thanks to  
everyone who's  
reading it.

All kinds of weird thoughts go through my head. First - I'm glad I'm not involved in business. Look at the people who are. Yuck! I've never been impressed with places like this. New, clean, big, expensive, plush and shiny - it looks like absolute shit to me. But that goes without saying. I must be getting bored. Comfortable chair I'm sitting in though. It occurs to me that I could come sit in here damn near anytime I want to, in this lobby in these chairs by this table. Pretend it's my hall, or reception room of my mansion. No one has said anything to me. Just look a little clean and safe and they'll figure you have a purpose there. Imagine all the places in town where one could just come and sit for free. I ought to discover as many as I can and compile a list. Most obvious are hotel lobbies of course. If I really got into it, I could probably find some real insane places to go. Places that have "free entertainment". Or places where it is good to sit and write. This isn't the best place to write, but it's OK. I can't really imagine driving out here and then just sitting in the damn lobby and writing. But while I'm here, I may as well make the most of it. This guy probably isn't going to show up. It's been about 45 minutes, and he probably figures I'll have given up by now. He'll probably call and apologize and arrange another meeting. I should make it at MY HOUSE. If he doesn't call I'll have to find his number and tell him to fuck himself. If he calls me and tries to arrange a meeting for later today (out here) I'll tell him to fuck himself. I'm too damn wimpy and nice though, so I'll probably just say - "Oh, that's OK." What a fag.

Some people are looking at me a lot now. Maybe I should just wait here all day. See if they kick me out when they close. I'll refuse to leave until I talk to the cleaning man. I'll fall on the floor - "I'm hungry! I need a jooooob!" (I'll wail). Gosh, I'm starting to fall asleep. That's no fun. I could be watching TV. I need something here. A flask of whiskey. I'd be able to wait him out then. Or wait out the whole building. There's a bathroom. A drinking fountain for chasers. Drinking isn't a hell of a lot of fun anymore. Only when you drink in weird places. That makes it taste different.

"A bomb RIPPED through the corporate offices lobby at blah blah place blvd. way. The only casualty



was a young man sitting in the lobby. He has no connection with the businesses in the building and no one knew why he was there. A link between the dead young man and the bombing is being investigated."

Hey - maybe that guy that called me is a terrorist and set a bomb to go off here so when it blew up I'd be killed and having no business here it would look like I was responsible. Damn clever. Shit - I'm getting worried now. BOOOOOOM! Hell! That would be weird. But wouldn't it have gone off by now? He probably wouldn't figure I'd wait this long. The bomb would probably be set for a little after two--when I was supposed to be here. Anyway--if there is a bomb set - it's as late as he is.

Sunday. Two days later.

Well, I waited there for two hours. People were starting to stare at me, but I was really getting caught up in some writing. I wrote another story and a song. It was OK. Then I left and checked out a hotel near there, also in hell and highway land. It was an expensive place, but I walked around like a guest and the employees all said HI to me.

Last night he called me and apologized. I said I had waited an hour - but it was OK. I'd still like an interview. So I was supposed to meet him out there on Sunday (today) at noon.

And you know what? I forgot all about it today. I really did. Honestly. The first time I've ever forgotten a job interview. It just slipped my mind. I was busy - typing and all - and hell - it was past noon when I finally remembered....

~~~~~  
FINALLY I ACTUALLY GET AN INTERVIEW FOR THE OFFICE CLEANING JOB. I get hired instantly. Start work that night. My supervisor is a big joking black guy and I work with a huge black woman Rhonda. She's really cool. We clean the offices on one floor of this new insane office building. It's not too hard and she seems to appreciate working with someone who actually works. I enjoy it. I love seeing people working late in these offices while were cleaning. I feel really good to be just cleaning the place not working in it. Empty disgusting fast food trash and menthol ashtrays. One day I discover the liquor in the big architect's firm. Just a halfgallon bottle of bad canadian whiskey. I take a few drinks. Every day then I cant help taking a few drinks. I like to get away with things, though I cant actually steal anything noticable. It keeps me going. But then I think-- what if they one day confront us with this dwindling whiskey? I'll lie--say no. But then the racist management will wonder about Rhonda. Either way--it'll look bad for her. She's supporting kids. Had two jobs as it is. But still--I cant resist the whiskey. When they call me from the bookstore again I agree to go back--just happy to get out of the office cleaning job--though I feel sad about it too. But at least I wont get caught and fired.

THE BOOKSTORE needed help with some big Octoberfestival but they also promised me regular hours too. The boss said they were going to "get rid" of the night clerk and that would be my job. But first the night clerk had to teach it to me. It was very uncomfortable. I also still priced books. There were also whole weeks without work. I knew it was fucked but I wanted to hang on as long as possible because by this time I was just curious what the hell was going to happen. So. To make long drawnout bullshit more condensed, one day I came in and I knew they had devised some devious system to measure the amount of work I had done the night before, failing to take into account the other work in the store I had done--straightening books--and I walked

in on the boss talking to the other boss about me--"get rid of him" he said. It was an embarrassing moment for us both. He then had to generate anger to cover himself. I was sent up to work. Harder. I worked about ten minutes and decided I had enough. I went down and told him I couldn't work under such conditions and I quit. Fine. We were both relieved. I was incredibly happy--a load of shit off my back--but unemployed and back out looking again--with no references.

THE THIRD SHIFT JANITOR'S JOB AT FRIENDLY'S looked good, and I had a good interview. Didn't hear from them again though, and two weeks later I saw the ad in the paper again. I called back and they said the guy they hired didnt work out. Also they lost my application so I went back and filled out another one. Another interview too. Two days later they called back and said they hired someone else for the janitor job but had an opening for second shift dishwasher. No thanks. Pride or something kept me from taking that bullshit. Other dishwasher jobs didnt call though. Nothing. I'm getting desperate. Temporary services. No calls. Delivery driver w/own car. No call. Plasma alliance and homeless shelter interviews. Phone soliciting jobs. No calls. ENDLESS.

I GET THE OSU BOOKSTORE WAREHOUSE JOB without even filling out an application. I'm not too excited, hate it at first, but it gets better. Seven months of minor bullshit, almost quitting, looking for something else. I apply at a sprout factory even--in a basement. Really cool just to see the place. I finally do get a job washing dishes at HollidayInn--it's kind of cool--but all in all worse than my bookstore warehouse job--staying til 3 or 4 in the morning to finish up. So I quit after three days. Flipping out one night on my way in--drive past and keep going. Oh well. A few more months at the warehouse and I move out of Columbus anyway. Glad to go. It's a real happy feeling not being stuck in this windowless warehouse all summer.

SUMMER 1987 SANDUSKY. I apply everywhere. I get three calls all summer for interviews. Nothing else. No job. Good thing I'm living with my parents not paying rent. In the fall I visit Kent--go job hunting--and in twenty minutes, the second place I go, I'm hired.

24 HOUR RESTAURANT JUST OPENED daytime dishwasher. It's kind of cool. Just excited to be working. It's not bad. But it quickly gets worse. The dishwasher constantly breaks down. They get a new one. It's worse. No plumbing. It's half a dishwasher. So I have to work twice as hard. It's the hardest I ever have to work. Seven or eight hours non-stop rush. I can deal with that--for awhile. It's interesting at least--I learn something about myself, and what makes restaurants run. There's always the BIG RUSH and the only way to deal with it is to get into it. Almost like you're doing sports or playing music. It's not so bad when you just flow with it like that--accept it. Caffeine is of course part of that, the necessary restaurant drug. That leads to the adrenaline flow, a warm happy busy excitement that gets you through whatever. The only thing was I didnt have any slow periods. The dirty dishes built up to a point where it took me the whole day to catch up--then I was supposed to do pots and pans. More tired and more tired and more depressed after work every day. Everyday I decided I'd quit, but then I would just go for 'one more day'. I needed the money. Finally it was too much. After a month. Couldnt make it in one morning. I felt kind of bad about it too, so I wrote them a letter apologising, and explaining how I felt--of course feeling free to add little bits to make a good story--like I got carried away with descriptions of my dreams. When I went in to pick up my check the boss wasnt too mad, appreciated my letter, and seemed a little concerned even. Wow--the power of writing--of fiction. I felt I could commit murder and get off free if I was allowed to write a description of the circumstances leading up to the crime.

WELL BACK LOOKING FOR JOBS AGAIN. A week passes. I get a job delivering frozen pizzas, cookies, and trash bags for a company that supposedly donates to leukemia, which really helps to say when

you're soliciting on the phone you know. Sound absurd? So does the 65¢ per delivery I get. Used half a tank of gas and delivered seven things in five hours. You figure it out. Hell, some people can do it but I can't see at night, and my car doesn't like it either. I stop for coffee instead of continuing. Another found and lost job....

IT JUST KEEPS GOING. Going on and on--a nightmare where you know it's a dream but you can't get yourself to wake up.

I'm sitting in the Elias Big Boy, Brunswick, Ohio (where I had been delivering)--drinking coffee and making notes. I'm going to write this job story tonight. Frozen pizzas out in the car. I'm in no hurry now. Insane waitress must be sixteen. Insane muzak. I actually like it. Help wanted sign on door. She says they have the airconditioning on (it's snowing outside)--it's freezing in there. I'm sitting at the misfit coffee counter. Guy asks her what do they got the airconditioner on for? "I don't know...cause it's 85 in Tampa." How is she so cool and only sixteen with braces? Why can't I deal with things like that? She's cool--I'm not. Not at all. There ARE good jobs. I've had a few. At least tolerable--with good points. Some you might even be able to keep for a year--or longer! She said the waitresses here can't date anyone at the coffee counter. Bullshit of the job. At my pizza delivery job they said we aren't officially required (but still expected) to buy an insanely ugly red hooded company sweatshirt for fifteen bucks out of the first paycheck. Bullshit. It's everywhere. That's the way it is though. Some people can do some things and some people can't. That goes for everyone and everything.

If you feel like you're going insane--you get a job and you can't handle it--even the moron working next to you has an easy time of it--but you just can't do it--you feel like you're going insane. You want to shoot yourself in the head. You want to hurt yourself on the job. You want to fall down and have them take you away in an ambulance--to a mental hospital. You're not alone. I've felt like this SO MANY times--and so have a lot of people. Good people, intelligent people, hard working people. There's certain things some people are good at--maybe what you're good at there's no jobs at--like playing guitar, or writing, or drawing or painting. Any job you would find in these activities would compromise the integrity at the heart of the thing. So you'd rather do these things on your own--when you're the boss--and make your living doing something not so important to you--like delivering pizzas or doing dishes--that you're not really good at--and your heart is never really into. It should be against the law for anyone to do any job that their heart is not into. But things aren't like that. The more common view is that JOB means something you don't like to do but HAVE to do to make a living. It is looked at as sinful to love your work--or make money doing something you like to do. This is screwed up--but that's the way it is.

Randy Russell Oct.22,1987 9:00am

GET A JOB

Eric Mayer

"You have to wear that tie, don't you?"

The kid on the bus had been asking about my job. Normally I wouldn't have given him the chance to start up the conversation that had kept me from finishing the Dick Francis paperback in my pocket but I'd been promoted to editor that morning and had the idea that the world had declared a temporary cease fire on me. I'd let my guard drop.

There was no answer to the tie question. I watched the kid haul his gym bag out the door. What would be the point in trying to explain that ever since 9th grade, when it became apparent that I wasn't going to "fill out" I've been partial to bulky sweaters, turtle necks, anything to add a few pounds to my frame. I'd wear nothing but three

piece suits if I could afford them. Legal editors can't afford them. But my job's not bad. It could be worse.

* * *

Because I shunned graduation ceremonies, my last day at Wilkes College was the day of my Early English Novel final. I had just about earned my B.A. in English Literature and was feeling sorry for myself. The last question on the final called for an essay. "Which of the novels we have read this semester was most meaningful to you, and why?" I wrote bitterly, and, I was told later with what passed for brilliance at Wilkes College, about Great Expectations. Then, with no more test to pass and no more diploma to seek, I walked out into the spring sunshine with no idea where I was headed, except across the Market Street Bridge to the car. When I stepped on the gas something came loose underneath the hood with an audible "ping". The pedal dropped loosely to the floor and the car refused to move. I know somewhat less about automobiles than I did about Laurence Sterne's manipulation of temporal reality in Tristram Shandy. I walked home. Fifteen miles.

It was the beginning of a grueling period. By night I scratched out laboriously detailed fanzine illustrations with a croquill pen, filling my hours with crosshatchings. By day I became a habitue of the Wilkes-Barre branch of the Pennsylvania Employment Services Office. Located off Public Square, on a short street bounded at one end by railroad yards which had lain deserted since the anthracite mines had shut down, it was one of those innocuous brick boxes that, perhaps not coincidentally, have replaced the forboding marble edifices of past eras when the government, despite its architectural bluster, lacked the power over our lives that proliferating regulation and computer dossiers have given it today.

Although ineligible to join the unemployment lines which stretched to the doors of the "benefits" section during that particular years recession by reason of the fact that I had never worked, I was duly registered and presented with a card to be signed by my employment counselor at each weekly appointment. Having been more or less kicked out of Wilkes-Barre's lone private employment agency, I toed the dotted line.

Long on hair and short on typing speed, I was a hopeless case. My card soon filled with an assortment of autographs as I was shuffled from one baffled counselor to another. Most were sympathetic if not helpful but from time to time one would insist on punching at the keyboard of his computer console and regaling me pointedly with a list of openings at high salaries for chemical engineers.

When pressed for my qualifications I mentioned I could write. I might as well have said I could breathe. "Yes, but what do you expect to do for a living?" For want of inspiration--I had never given this question the slightest thought--I muttered something about "management". To me management meant you sat at a desk, a familiar occupation to me, and if you were given orders they were at least given politely. To the counselors "management" meant running fast food franchises. I was dispatched to Hazelton where a beefy young representative from Carols Hamburgers asked me why I thought I had what it took to be a leader of men.

I was not offered an opportunity to reap glory in the fast food wars. That was not unusual. In more than a year of job hunting I had only two offers. The one I rejected came during the summer when my brother joined me briefly at my usual hangout between school semesters. He had been doing carpentry work and a delighted counselor immediately gave him an address to report to. Having completed tracing the last of the stars in my latest fanzine illustration the previous night and having no new ideas, I went along to kill time.

It was raining hard as we drove up into the Heights. The chronically ill wipers on the Volkswagon beat feebly at the drops. My brother kept turning them off, letting the water sheet clearly down the windshield to allow us to read the street signs. We saw the yellow "No

Outlet" sign first. The street apparently ran to the edge of an old strip mining pit. All the houses along it, save one, were half demolished, facades torn away to reveal sagging floors and the dark cavities of empty rooms. The house that still stood at the end of the street was dark.

Nevertheless my brother knocked. "C'min," someone said thickly. "Doors open." Indeed, the door had begun to creak open at the knock. We went through and found ourselves in a squalid living room. The room's single window was open to the rain and sodden curtains dripped onto a bare wood floor. The entrepreneur who had applied to the state to put a dent in the unemployment statistics was sitting in a rocking chair in the middle of the room, in his underwear.

"So, you wanna job," he said. He was clutching a can of Gibbons and other cans were scattered about, in the corners, on the window sill. It was like one of the picture puzzles they run in children's magazines. How many beer cans can you spot in this picture? He squinted hard at us, perhaps trying to decide whether the employment service had mistakenly sent two bodies or whether he was seeing double. "Got some shit to tear down," he finally said. "Wanna start now?"

My brother remembered a previous appointment. "T'morrow, seven then," his prospective employer told him. I had been standing discreetly to the side, but the fellow had kept glancing at me. "You needa job too, right?" he said perceptively. My heart must have beat faster for a second. In months of job hunting I had yet to hear a kind word. But before I could fall unto the damp floor and kiss his feet he sent my hopes crashing. "Ever use a chain saw," he said. "S'easy. Have a beer and I'll teach you."

I decided discretion was the better part of dismemberment. Still, I was ashamed that I had refused work, however unsuitable, and vowed it would not happen again. Which is how I came to accept the equally unsuitable job I was offered next.

At first it seemed up my alley. My counselor advised me that Procter and Gamble would be launching an advertising campaign in Wilkes-Barre and temporary help was needed. Advertising was another profession which, I knew nothing about and could therefore imagine myself qualified for. The most popular local tv ad, featuring Senior Wences plugging Gibbons beer—"Is good."—did not convince me I lacked the requisite talent.

A minute after the company representative bounded into the conference room where a few dozen bedraggled hopefuls had congregated, it was obvious that Procter and Gamble would be sending its Wilkes-Barre recruits to the trenches rather than to Headquarters. "My company," the representative announced, "is about to launch a major advertising campaign to introduce a revolutionary new product, a powerful new detergent unlike anything the world has seen before." He paused for effect. He was a round little man. His arms were stubby but his wrists, one displaying a heavy gold watch, still stuck out of the even shorter sleeves of his bright green sportsjacket. "If selected," he concluded, "you will be privileged to hang ERA on every knob in Wyoming Valley."

Shoving aside the stack of applications on the table in front of him, he began hiring, apparently on looks. When I realized the job required distributing detergent samples rather than words I wanted to leave. But I recalled my vow following the fiasco during the summer. And besides, what could a prospective employer see in me, dressed in ragged bellbottoms and army surplus coat, my hair pulled to one side to keep it out of my eyes in deference to the occasion? Gritty determination, maybe.

We allembled on a cold November morning at a warehouse near the city limits. The surrounding culm banks, sheened with frost, glimmered in the first light of dawn. Under the warm orange lights inside the warehouse, forklifts were transferring cartons of ERA samples to the loading

docks. From there a couple of brawny workers were muscling them into the three battered station wagons that comprised the mechanized division Procter and Gamble had assigned to Wilkes-Barre. There seemed no end to the cartons. It was not, I decided, going to be a good day.

Our objective was an area on the far side of the railroad yards, in the shadow of the VA hospital. I had grown up in a suburb five miles from the city's core. The area might as well have been the moon or Vietnam so far as I was concerned.

I was teamed with two regular employees, Jim, gangly and quiet and Billy, short and loud. "Damn cold," said Billy, slipping with practiced ease into his sample carrier. "Yeah," agreed Jim, setting the tone for the day's conversations. "Damn cold."

We were given a routine to follow. We were to stop at each door, hang our sample, which came in a plastic bag, on the doorknob and knock, to alert occupant to her good fortune, then depart. If by chance, occupant managed to reach the door before we escaped we had a short spiel to recite. The prospect of banging on strange doors and, most likely, having to speak to strange people, was, needless to say, terrifying. At first I slunk up to the doors, did my ringing and bounded away in a frenzy. However, the adaptability of the human animal is amazing, especially when it weighs 100 pounds and is hauling 35 pounds of detergent samples. Before long I was telling myself it was no different than trick-or-treating. Back then I'd stood on strange porches and recited "Black and Gold." All I had to say this time was "Here is your free sample of ERA, the new wonder detergent."

There were a few cranky sorts who squinted from between almost imperceptibly parted curtains. But most seemed genuinely pleased with their small windfall. I began to feel like an underweight and slightly out of season Santa. I added a cheery, "Good morning," to my spiel. It was swell being a productive member of society.

It was not so swell for me as for Billy. During our first break, he leaned up against the wall of the auto repair shop we had stopped behind and related a lurid encounter he claimed to have just experienced with a young woman in a flimsey negligee. "Never fails in this line of work," he assured me.

"Never does fail," Jim agreed. "Not with Billy, anyway."

I was dubious about it, but Billy persisted, pointing out a window on the fifth floor of the tenement across the street. I really had no idea what people who lived behind automobile repair shops might do. I had debated reality with Kant and Berkely but had not gotten off Lake Street in Dallas. The tightly packed, shingled houses along our Kidder Street route, their porch stoops on the sidewalk, horrified me. I thought spacious suburban lawns were my birthright. I failed to connect them with the employment I could not get.

At lunch, over undercooked hamburgs and overcooked fries, Billy held forth on his life of adventure. He was a corporate Johnny Appleseed, sowing the fruits of the free enterprise system across the land. "We did Detroit during the summer. Next month, we may be in Florida. That's the rumor." It wasn't like being chained to a desk.

That afternoon I began to have visions of desks equipped with comfortable swivel chairs. The straps of the 35 pound sample carrier began to cut into my boney shoulders, creating a localized soreness which quickly spread down my back and into my calves. During the waning days of my Scouting career I had backpacked 50 pounds unto a Jamboree campsite. But that had been a gravity aided stumble down a short dirt road. The ordeal with the samples went on and on. I started counting porch steps. I became intimately acquainted with the mechanics of walking, the way the muscles flexed and the tendons moved. The pain. A few times when our paths crossed Jim eyed me with concern. "Lend me some of your samples," he said, "I'm running low."

At last it ended. We stood breathing frostily under streetlights that had come on some time before, waiting for our ride back to the warehouse. My feet, in my torn sneakers, were numb. In the dark, a

few potted geraniums that had survived the first frosts, glowed on the porch stoops. Billy and Jim talked about the motel they were staying in. "Some life, isn't it," said Billy. "You know any good night spots around here?"

I was in no shape for night spots. When I finally slept that night, I dreamed of climbing endless stairways, of entering doorways optimistically only to find myself in bare rooms. When I woke I could almost literally not move. My first day of employment was my last. Not long afterwards I applied to take law school entrance tests.

* * *

My job isn't bad. I may have to wear a tie but I have an office with a door I can close and I don't have to do my own typing. From my seat at the big, grey metal desk I see through the window only the blank concrete wall of the War Memorial. But if I squeeze into the corner by the coat rack I can watch the Genesee River flowing through the center of Rochester. It could be worse.

sometimes if i stop to think about what im doing i start hanging up on people. my job is in marketing research doing surveys intercepts and getting people to come in for paid discussion groups we did surveys for the AIDS foundation calling people at random and asking them after a short introduction how many sex partners they had had in the past year and read them a list of explicit practices to see which ones they had done and how many times we called households for a hospital to see how many people knew someone with a drug or alcohol problem

this means within a minute or two of the intro you have to sound as if what youre asking is no big deal youre not really interested its just a job, this is a life or death issue, or apologetic for having disturbed them and still get in everything you want to say just from their hello you can usually tell if theyre receptive and which one to use

once we had to go out on the street i was forced to wear a hat and my boss goes and tone down that eye makeup and i hardly even wear any and my friend david couldnt wear his earrings although he did wear a pair of the pointiest shoes ive ever seen carrying a card with six expensive items on it and go up to people eating lunch and ask them if they had 3 of the 6 insane things like cellular car phones i got to be pretty funny and it was real hard not to crack up at people

it pays good money 8 bucks an hour and the shifts are usually short 4-5 hours and you dont work every day unless youre really broke and when you do you know that in a week or two youll be off without work so you dont have to feel guilty because its their fault youre not working

unless you need the money for rent and then its nervous for awhile im nonskilled and the only other work i could get would be for minimum wage and have to work 40 hours a week and i dont want to i choose to work less and have time to write and live but i still feel bad when i cant go home to visit my family or when i think about my grandfather in the mill for 7.00 a week for 84 hours or people who have to work really hard like manual labor so its hard to complain but i still do

it can be really hard to barge into someones home not knowing what theyre doing david called someone and they said they were in bed and he goes yeah but you werent sleeping were you and plunged right into the interview i cant do that but he makes me laugh my favorite person at work is an older man with grey brushcut hair who wears impeccable old fashioned suits with bowties and suspenders and hiking boots

when the people ask how much longer it will take hell say if youd just go along with it sir we could be done already and force them through it

if they ask too many questions in the beginning hell just say very kindly just let it go maam

which is such a concise and beautiful way to say so many things he regularly fights with another guy in the office who refers to himself in the third person as th fat pup and has a tatoo that says piss in boots about whos louder and more distracting

s. told me the other day about the pup he thinks hes an actor on stage playing to an audience a lot of things seem funny after youre on the phone for 6-8 hours like the woman scott worked with who couldnt read and memorized the surveys until she got called on in a briefing to read and they found out and fired her everything about the job is worth it for the two or three people a month that ill talk to that are truly unique and fascinating like ike in north carolina that was trying to organize a union in his textile factory knowing that hed get fired the old woman in arkansas that told me of course the state doesnt pay to educate people because then it couldnt control them john in monterey who told me everything i wanted to know about the john steinbeck library and the federal reserve system he was an 80 year old ex union president

once we did a survey and we had to read people a list of magazines to see which ones they read and at the end i put the closest penguins and people would say i never heard of it and id think you have now but i was told to knock it off

but maybe it paid off because a little while later i called someone and said hello this is denise dee from rd and they said the denise who does the closest penguins and i was ecstatic maybe thats why i stay here anything can happen and i havent even talked about all the great people i met there

Denise Dee

Job Dream

Had a dream that I was in a place that combined my current job with my old job as a kitchen sanitation worker, the place was a combination of the kitchen (the shape of it) and the office where I now work as a telephone interviewer (the office furniture) One difference was that everyone was nasty, even though most of the people at my new job are nice. I had to wash a trayful of dishes and to wash them I had to put them in the Xerox machine. I started to put them in one machine that had special indentations to hold them but then one of the office women said she had to use the machine. So I tried putting them in the other machine, but it had one of those tops that moved and they fell off. I got yelled at & told to get back to work even though everyone else was just sitting around & one person was listening to a Walkman. I decided that I couldn't work and I was going to go and punch out even if I got fired for leaving, but i woke up before I got to the time clock.

Carol Schneck

I think retail jobs are this century's greatest contribution to Masochism. Horrible hours, bad pay and asshole management DO provide a constant source of irritation, but remember: Lack of rank has its privileges. There is nothing more entertaining than playing mild-mannered sales jerk while an irate consumer screams at Bwana because he won't take an item back.

I work in the Camera Dept. at a Cruel Mart catalog showroom, one of the anchor stores at Plummet Mall. The gizmos who designed this place have a great warped sense of humor. (I wonder if they enjoy painful black leather shoes from Fenney's like me?) Cruel Mart is done up in ersatz High Tech—no right angles, grey carpet and walls, black and white signs— it bores and depresses the spuds into buying totally useless junk...Whadd i cum in here for?? Fardun me ser, y'have any brass duckhead bottle op'ners?

Watching someone attempt to make a purchase in here can be real amusing; sorta like those films in science class...y'know, the ones where the rats have to push the correct switch to get a food pellet. Example: Mr. X is Christmas shopping. It plenty busy in C.M. today so he wanna get outta dere pronto. Au contraire. He wants a camera, a Walkman, a watch und a

trainset. The camera will come out of Cameras (we have our own stockroom). The Walkman can be paid for in Cameras, but first, Mr. X has to go to Electronics and write down the catalog number on a cute lil' order form which he will give to us so we can ring it up. The watch? Pay for it at Watches. The trainset? Get it in Toys...Whattabout mah Walkman?!...it will come out at Package Pick-up, on the other side of the store.

Yet Cruel Mart is only one element in an overall Corporate Plan to divide this country further into Haves and Must-Haves. Sugar, caffeine, alcohol and meat are being replaced by things twice as deadly. (Yeah, remember the tribbles?! ED) You're gonna get edgier, nastier without the Real Thing charging through the old synapses. You dont know what you want but you want it NOW! Maybe...maybe...drive out to the mall an'..an' BUY A DISC CAMERA—NO MORE THINKING ABOUT PICTURES!!! YUK YUK LOOKA THAT VIDEO GAME; COMMUNIST MUTANTS FROM OUTER SPACE...THINK I'LL GET IT FER JR, GOTTA MAKE THESE KIDS APPRECIATE AMERIKA.

DID I EVER TELL YOU ABOUT THAT?

Say, is that a navy blue suit you got on? You know what a man's formal dress is if he doesn't have a tuxedo? A navy blue suit! (Surprise.) I bought a navy blue suit in 19and55 (Ah, the bouquet.) from Blubbladablah's downtown store. I was gonna buy a grey flannel suit but the fellah there said I should buy a navy blue suit...so that's what I bought...a navy blue suit...yep...uh, did I ever tell you about the time I was in the Army with Buddy Hackett...did I ever tell you about that?

GODDAMN POLAROID

I got stuck with the 10-9 shift today. It doesn't matter (MUCH). It's grey inside and outside Plummet Mall...grey depressing Ohio nothingness... it's seeped into everything: my coffee tasted like Keopectate and all the TV sets in the Electronics Dept. have lost their color. Too painful to think unless you're an alien or rich enough to control contrast levels. Everything's been reduced...the Lowest Common Denominator is now 50% off...come and buy... Hey, Big Spender drones out of the Musak system. A humanoid stumbles up to my freshly-cleaned counter. May I help you sir? Brutal chainsaw voice—caused by a cigar clamped between chalky green teeth— informs me he is looking for an instant camera. Well, we have a Polaroid on sale today for \$57.87...What's the reg'lar price?...\$58.87...Yuh mean that GODDAMN POLAROID is only a dollah off? I'm just a sales clerk sir...(smoke this white owl, pal). Mr. Charming buys the GODDAMN POLAROID anyway (perhaps to keep his Fucking Kodak company). While I ring the camera up, his over-reactive oral glands make enough drool to float a Navy on the glass countertop...Look! There's Anthony and Cleopatra now!

... AND THAT'S ALL SHE WROTE

May I help you, sir?
I'd like to see one of your, uh, disc cameras.
Sure. Which one?
Well, wuddabout that there one on sale?
The 3100?
Yeah. How those THANGS werk?
Lift this lever up here and the back cover comes down. Put the film in and...
That's the feeelm? Whut kinda pictures do they take?
They're okay for snapshots, but not for enlargements.
The photos tend to be rather grainy.
Whudja say 'bout loadin' it?
You put the film in, close the cover, turn it on, and the film goes to the first frame. Each time you press the shutter, the film is automatically advanced to the next frame. The 3100 also has an

automatic flash, uses a 9-volt battery and comes with a 3-year warranty.

Gee...so yuh put the film in and that's all she wrote.

Yes.

I betcha sell lots of them thangs, huh?

Yes, we do. Last year, we sold over 400 of them.

Gaaahhhuhahhlee! Well, I'll take one. How much is the film?

\$2.29 for a single pack, \$4.24 for a double.

I'll take a duble.

Will this be cash or charge, sir?

I'll pay for it.

Betcha sell lotsa them disc cameraz, huh?

Yes, we do.

Yuh juz put the feeelm in thar, point and shoot, and that's all she wrote.

Yes.

\$30.57 please? Out of \$35.00. Your change is \$4.43. There's one, two, three, four and forty-three. Thank you.

Betcha sell TONZ of those, huh?!

I hate Jobs. The word 'Job' is like an excuse for doing crummy things: 'I'm sorry ma'am, I'm just doing my Job' 'It's a job' 'Someone's gotta do it (It being a Job). I don't mind work, but Jobs,...they're JOBS. JOB is one of those little words that if you keep saying it over and over and looking at it, it seems to become just a meaningless syllable, a series of letters that somehow look kind of funny together, that eventually get so abstract, it's hard to believe that it's actually a word that means something. And that is what Jobs are like. Jeff Curtis

I'd better get a better job

Because thars so many things

I want to buy on tv

Also a tv

If I didn't watch tv there'd probably be less, actually probably just as much but different -- Already I don't watch tv much so it's different.

Mostly stuff I want to buy only because I can't borrow them anywhere and the only thing to do is to buy things and lend them out. I don't like the idea of having things as much as having things at my disposal -- I wish I could sponser a great huge library/museum full of cool records and books and tapes and videos and magazines and comics and, oh if possible, paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, masical instruments, recording devices, photographs, etc. All stuff I could read and hear and use, but not have to own, and could share with others interested in them. Unfortunately this seems unlikely so I have to get a better job -- The Ideal job would be one that didn't take up much of my time, and would help me get other things done I want to do -- in particular, ART and music and publishing, at a large rate of pay, where I would be responsible to myself or anyone else interested in what I was doing only..

I guess a job is just a mean(s?).

Jeff Curtis

I have an ok job. I work in a copy shop that is part of a large chain of copy shops that is kind of like the Mc Donalds of copy shops. It's a clean, comfortable place to work, and when it isn't really busy, like when school is in session and the place is full of students, teachers, and especially namby-pamby graphic design majors, it is a nice place to work. But mostly it is just a job. I work there because I really do not know quite what else to do. It certainly is not for the money. I have a bachelors degree in English, with a very strong visual arts background and a great interest in music. Everyone says I should go back to school and get my masters degree. The thing is, is that I don't want a masters degree in english. I hardly had to do anything to get my bachelors, and I don't really know what I'm supposed to do with it now that I have it, which makes me feel rather foolish for even having it. I can't really write that well, and I have little interest in pursuing writing as a vocation; I don't really read that much, although I always am buying books I want to read—which I rarely get around to reading. Most of what I do concerns the things which most realistically would be the hardest to make any kind of reasonable living at—Art, and music. The reason that I don't feel like it would be easy to make money in these areas is that I'm not interested in commerciality too much. I hate most popular music, and I have so much background in 'fine' art that commercial art is usually boring to me. However, of those two occupations, I think it would be easier for me personally to prostitute my art, since I'm more skilled at doing that than music—you see I'm in a band that plays what your average person on the street would think was 'punk rock' but is actually a lot closer to the most simple traditional music in the world, than any thing really antisocial or conformist or whatever. I think that I can disguise any kind of personal expression in my art, however, so that people will mistake it for commercial art at least long enough to give me a few bucks to eat. Anyway, for now, I work in a copy shop, and when it's not busy, like now, this is what I think about a lot. Duh.

Yes. Thanks.

Do you need help with anything, ma'am?

I'd like to see some calculators.

What kind are you looking for? A standard one or a scientific one?

Just a standard one. My grandson is going to be nine this weekend and...

Just put the film in thar and that's all she wrote.

Excuse me. Yes, that's right.

O.K.!!! 'BYE!!!!

My, he's been here all that time...heh, hah! INDEED.

Jim Clinefelter

JEFFCURTIS.

FIRST JOB OUT OF COLLEGE

W. Joe Hoppe

They give me the usual application. Two sides, experience comes before education. And it's all made up of little tiny boxes that are impossible to stay inside. This is the third one that I've filled out today. So I find a corner between the cash register part and the garage part of this hustle bustle gas station, not much crosswise traffic here, and start filling in the boxes.

I use my full name, even though I go by my middle. Things are already screwed up and I've only filled in the first line. Onward through the address scene, no service record, no felony convictions, then a big grid with eighth of an inch high by two inch long spaces for prior employment. With that little space I can leave out a lot. Like street addresses or phone numbers, which I hardly ever remember or get anyways. But I put in almost all of the jobs I have had. I need to be able to get back to my prior gas station experience, way back in high school: jobs and jobs and years and years ago. Pizza driver, assistant librarian, summer camp counselor, clerk-cashier at an all night station (previous experience showing up already), line help at a car wash, free-lance reporter, television production assistant (a great title, at least), gas station attendant: there we go.

At the bottom of the page under "other qualifications" I get to put in my National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence certification for tune-ups. It was something that I got in high school, after auto shop and working in a garage. It was book learning. I passed a test was all. But I'm still proud of it. I flip the application over and there's the big one. Education. I always ignore it when they ask for grammar school. High school, community college, and then the big U. That's University of Michigan. Here I am with my degree and I really want to work at your gas station, sir. And I do, on the midnight shift, when strange things happen, when I'm all alone in the magic hours, when the bars close down, when the waitresses get off work, when I can sleep all day and stay up all night and watch the sun rise. I really do want to work here; Gas Station right off the big highway, so close to Detroit and Metro Airport. That's right, I graduated in April, sent out hundreds of resumes, and no one else has hired me yet.

Three people are off to my left, gathered around the cash register, more or less. There's a plain female inside the cash counter boundaries. I wouldn't remember her if I saw her again. Shells quiet. The manager is a big guy with a blown dry hairstyle and a big brown tie with Amoco seals embroidered in. His tie tack has a little AC sparkplug on it. 'sides the tie he's wearing the normal gas station blue shirt with name patch and those cool strange blue colored workpants. So there's a lot riding on that tie. It's about enough. The manager's talking with a slick young fella who probably wears high heeled cowboy boots on his big nights out. He's just wearing workboots now, though. He's also in the gas station uniform, but the feathered hair and the gold chain tip you off as to where he's comin' from, even before he opens his mouth. His name patch says "Vince" and he's telling some story.

"Last night my wife and me celebrated her birthday. She's twenty seven now. I started calling her my old lady. Oooh does she get pissed about that. I just tell her she better start getting used to it. So anyways, it's her birthday, and to celebrate I got these big thick porterhouse steaks and we grill 'em outside. Made up some nice baked potatoes, tossed salad... We were drinking whiskey sours. You know, celebrating. Then we were going to go out and meet some friends at the bar."

I'm down to the part of the application where they ask for references. I don't have any in Ann Arbor. My old library boss has

gone off for parts unknown. I didn't get along at Domino's. My creative writing teacher buddy is in Utah, and I'm not sure how "respectable" he would be for a reference anyhow. I just don't spend much time with the type of people who would make good references. I need three. So I take Michael, the big old standby and upright citizen adult type I know, Ben, who owns the Jackson Blazer and I haven't seen in two years, and Joolie's mom. I don't think they ever call these people anyways. They just want to know if you can put three down. Vince is still talking.

"So by the time those steaks were done, took 'em a while, I'll admit, I'd had about four drinks and she'd had three. She was getting a little drunk there. She only ate about half her steak, hardly touched her potato, and she passed out, right on the back lawn. Well she was in a chair of course, but outside, right by the grill. So I finished up my meal, no sense in letting it go to waste. Gave her steak to the dog. And she was still passed out. Ended up carryin' her in."

I get down to the part where I sign my name. I use my first initial and my full middle name. Then I re-read the app. so as to hear the rest of Vince's story.

"She was drunk. Drunk as a skunk. But I fucked her anyway. She kind of woke up for that. She was passed out, but I fucked her anyway." The manager laughs. The girl at the register doesn't do much. I'm kind of surprised that Vince would talk like that in front of her. Seems like the type to watch his language in front of the "ladies." I wait until he's gone, asking the boss, who he keeps calling "Boss," about an overheating problem in his Monte Carlo, before I come up with the application.

The manager takes it. I point out my previous experience. He stars it. My big college degree is a subject never broached. "What shift do you want to work?"

"Midnight."

"Ever worked midnights before?"

"Yes, sir. At the Shell Station. There on the application. They don't leave you much room to fill things in, do they?" Trying to be a regular guy. He lets it pass.

"Okay, you have a job now?"

"No sir. I can start immediately and I'm available any shift."

"But you'd prefer midnights."

"Yeah."

"You a family man? Wife and kids to support?"

"No, sir."

"Well this is a part time position."

"That's fine."

"I'm taking applications the rest of the week. I should be calling for interviews sometime next week."

"Okay, thanks a lot." And away. It looks like it would be a real cool place to work.

#####

A week and a half later and all the positions I've applied for have been filled. (I called around.) Well, a couple of places hadn't got around to deciding yet. Despair sets in. Roommate Tom wants to go to the zoo in Detroit. He'll pay for the gas. We get back in the evening and roommate Alan has a message for me to call the gas station.

"First they asked for William, and I didn't know who they were talking about. Then they mispronounced your last name. I never even figured it out until he made sure this was the right phone number. Then he used your middle name, and I said, 'Oh, suure. He lives here.' Anyways, you're supposed to call Pat." Ah, Alan.

I get up early the next morning--nine o'clock. Call Pat. He'll interview me at two.

I'm wearing black pants and a nice plaid shirt, not wanting to be too dressed up, and Pat the Boss is there in his tie with the spark plug tie clasp. He takes me into his back room office. There's a desk, Amoco stuff, a woodgrain-plastic and cardboard and shiny gold plastic antiquey

Spanish map of the world is on one wall. The floor is painted cement. Pat sits in his big swivel chair. I get to sit too. "So. You wanted to work midnights. Any experience working midnights before?"

"Yes sir, a couple of months at the Shell Station." I nod my head towards the application he's got in his hand.

"Why do you want to work midnights?"

"Well actually, I figured that a lot of other people wouldn't want to be working those hours, so I'd have a better chance of getting hired. Then I do like working at night. Don't mind working alone."

"Okay." I must have given him the right answer. "Now this is only part time, twenty four to thirty two hours, about. Any days you can't work?"

"No. Free all the time."

"No problems with working on the weekends?"

"Nope."

"All right." He flips the application over. Here it goes. "So you've got a Bachelor's Degree. What in?"

"Communications. I wanted to write for a newspaper or something, but I sent out a lot of resumes, and I haven't been hired, so..."

It works. And that's the first time that has happened. "So are you planning to be sticking around for a while? You don't want just summer employment."

"No, I'll be staying around Ann Arbor for a while. I really like the town." I'd leave tomorrow if someone offered me a better job, but I do want this one, and right now, I wouldn't mind hanging out in old A² at least the rest of the summer. Gas station work isn't so bad.

"Fine. Now this job only starts out part time, but if a full time position opens up, you'll have first crack at it. There will be a three-day training period, where you'll be here with one other person. I was thinking of having you come in tonight. Can you come in tonight?"

"Sure."

"Good. The man I'll have training you is a good man, knows his stuff, a real good man. His name is Joe. Same as yours, I guess. Now he'll be training you for two nights, then he'll just be watching you the third night, and he won't be able to help you, you'll do it all yourself. Can you handle that?"

"I think so." Don't want to sound too cocky.

"Now the midnight man has some other duties too. You have to clean the place, do the floors, wipe off all the counters, do all this glass you see around here, clean the johns, clean my office here, and every so often you'll take all the stuff off the shelves and clean them, too. You'll be wiping down the various machines we have around here...Think you can handle that?"

"I think so. I was a janitor in a machine shop for a while. I used to clean at the gas station I worked at in high school too."

"Fine. So you're kind of used to it. You probably noticed the shape the station was in when you came in today." I start to say that it looked pretty good, but he cuts me off. "Well as far as I'm concerned, it's just filthy." Pat's face is great when he says "filthy". His receding chin bunches all up, his eyebrows scrunch down over indignant eyes, his lips twist around and he spits the word out over his bad teeth; "filthy." Oooh, say it again, Pat. He goes on for a while about how he's used to clean stations and just how clean that is and how it's all the responsibility of the midnight man. He isn't doing a very good job of scaring me off.

"And there's one more thing I've got to emphasize, and I can't emphasize it enough. When you're here, you're here alone. No one is to be allowed into the station. Tell 'em you're locked in and the only way

you can get out is to bust a window. If you've got to go out to go to the john, which you should wait to do until there's nobody here, and there will be some slow times, you take your keys and lock the door behind you. You are not to leave this place and you are not to let anyone else in. To emphasize this, say someone is having a heart attack right out on the drive. You don't let 'em in. Call the cops and wait for them to get here. Tell 'em

you're locked in, that the only way you can get out is to bust a window."

It's fire and brimstone there for a while. Pat is all excited. Great image though, locked in this all night fluorescent light gas station, people dying out on the drive and not being able to do anything about it. Seems like in real life it would be hard to just sit there and watch, though.

Pat winds down, everything is fine. I'll be getting trained tonight by Joe. Then I come in Tuesday. My final day of training is Thursday, and we'll see about a schedule after that. Shake hands. Ask for Joe tonight.

Thank you, sir.

We have no food or money now so we've been trying to catch enough fish to stay alive. The great Thureau experiment. I've just come in from hunting night crawlers in the back yard. You have to bend way over and sweep your flashlight in slow arcs along the grass and when you spot one you pull the light away real quick, hardly enough time for the image to imprint on your retinas, or the worm senses the light and runs. They lay with one end still in the hole and can snap back in quicker than a camera flash when frightened. It's amazing. You really have to develop the reflexes to be good at it. There's a lot of funny skills involved like being able to see the damned things first of all and holding the light so that the side of the beam is on the worm so you can see him but he can't feel it, grabbing the worm and being able to separate the worm from the grass in your hand just by touch and holding the worm without stretching it or crushing it. And when you grab them, you have to find the end that's in the hole and work it out gently or the worm will break itself in half and half will go down the hole. There's a bonus when you catch two fucking. They lay the fat ends out on the ground, sort of wrapped together or stuck like glue and worm cum sort of foams around them. They're a lot slower to move when they're like this so they're easier to catch. The trick is to grab them both at the fucking segments in your fist and hold them while you work them out of the holes with your other hand so you get them both. I was an expert at this maneuver when I was little, but I got older.

I remember when Jonny Cella and I used to catch night crawlers for money. We would start about dusk and work all the yards in the neighborhood, hunched over like little hunters stalking through the grass. By the time we had to go in, which was usually about eleven, we would fill the whole bottom of a wagon with worms. In the morning we would get up early and pull the wagon to the bait store by the rail road tracks. The guy at the bait store would go through all the worms and sort out the near dead ones and the ones that were stretched and would count out all the rest and give us eight cents a dozen. We made about two dollars a day a piece even though the guy at the bait store was ripping us off. It was plenty for pop and candy and shit like that. It was great until Jon's older brother Joel found out about it and started beating us up so he could get the worms. My first job experience.

I think I like the prditory aspect the best about it. These things are tricky as hell to catch so there's a lot of sport to it. While crouching around the yard tonight, I kept remembering when my dad taught me how to catch 'em. He used to take me around the block to a friend of his house and sit on his back porch and drink beer with him while I would diligently stalk the yard with my little search light, snatching with indian skill and filling my coffee can. It's a completely absorbing activity, one that catches your entire being up in the hunting high. I loved it when I was younger. My nights were full with it, each one packed with excitement. I would wake up excited about it every day, bursting to get to my wagon and see how much we got the night before. I used to know how to live when I was a little kid. I knew what it was about; it was about catching night crawlers at night and selling them in the morning. Simple. Nowadays I don't know what to do. I do things I hate for money that's never enough and drink myself to sleep and spend most of my time bored and lonely and frustrated. I grew up. Could be why my father used to like to take me hunting them so much, so he could sit on the porch, drink his beer, and watch.

Mike Baker

My Worst Job

Last summer I did some time as the lint cleaner at the University Laundries out by Northwood. The Laundry was this large, factory-like building that cleaned many lbs of bed sheets, surgical clothes, diapers, etc, from the U. hospitals and it was my job 3 times a week for four hours to crawl around every foot of the place with an air hose and sweep up piles of lint—a real lesson in the transient nature of fabric. For this job I was issued gloves, goggles, air filter masks, and ear plugs, for protection from lint, germs, and noise. Of course this was typical dumb shit administration thinking, it was impossible to use your hands with the gloves and the goggles would fog up. The air masks produced this nasty taste in your mouth but I still used them when I started to choke. The ear plugs always were used because the whistle from the air hose was too painful otherwise. Yeah, this job really sucked. The only reason I stuck with it was because of this fucked work ethic disease ingrained in me that found gratification in the 'privilege' to do shit like this. To clean the loading area I was obliged to lay on this flat cart and roll myself w/air hose deep underneath the piles of clean stuff where I would get stuck, tangle the air hose all to hell and generally piss myself off. The sorting station upstairs was even more of a trip. This is where they had to sort out shit filled diapers, bloody towels, bandages and any other surprises that the good folk at the hospitals didn't want to deal with. There were always a good amount of flies and cockroaches up there though they sprayed it every three weeks. The smell up there was potent and earthy and as a point of interest, when taken all together it smelled just like saliva. This came to me one day when I woke(don't you drool in your sleep too?). Upstairs was also where they collected out all the scalpels, hemostats, syringes, and a trickle of odd pills that were forgotten in the pockets of the uniforms. This last item attracted considerable attention from your narrator though without much luck in finding any of the mind altering variety. The long roller in the middle of the room served as sorting table and is the center for graffiti of the building. On it, along with various names and dates is written; Roses are red/ Violets are blue/ Sugar is sweet/ And so are you.

Tom Shannon

A REAL CHARACTER

by Tim Coats

I was getting tired of the remarks Bert, a fellow parking attendant, was making. He was standing next to my booth while I waited on the cars that came through.

After one guy, who was slow paying, drove out, Bert said, "I think that sign over there that says HAVE YOUR TICKET AND MONEY READY isn't clear enough. Like that guy that just drove through—he probably thought he did have his ticket ready. He just didn't have it out. And his money was as ready as can be, right there in his wallet in his back pocket."

When two young black guys drove out, he said, "You know they kept talking to each other and ignored you just to show off how

brave they are to ignore white people. You watch, a lot of them are doing it now after that black guy was killed in Queens."

A young, business-suited Asian guy came through fast in a shiny, small foreign car. He asked for a receipt for his fifty-cent ticket. I knew exactly what Bert would say.

"Boy, they sure keep an eye on that money," he said.

A woman drove up and asked for her change to include eight quarters. Quarters in hand, she gave me a slight nod and drove out.

"Boy, some people sure know how to show gratitude," Bert said.

"Bert," I said, "I can't listen to anymore of this kind of talk. I'm sorry to—"

"Hello, brown-eyes!" he said.

An attractive young, business-suited woman had driven up to my gate.

"Boy, you sure get the beautiful customers," Bert said, in a loud voice. He kept talking to her ~~or~~ about her as I took her money and gave her the change. She did her best to be pleasant, even though she was a little cool toward Bert's approach.

After she drove out, he said, "You probably didn't like me talking to her like that. Right?"

"That's correct, Bert," I said.

He grinned, reared back and gave me a long, hard stare. Then he said, "Boy, you're a real character."

SOMETHING ABOUT MY JOB IN THE ASTRONOMY DEPARTMENT

It is almost noon and all morning here at work I have been busy, busy with work stuff, but underneath all of that I have been thinking about my own stuff a lot too, that's a different kind of thinking. So I figure that's why I can do both of them at one time, even though I know that while I am thinking of my own stuff it comes out on the expressions on my face and the expressions probably don't match with what I am doing with my work stuff. All morning I have been thinking of these things, they are songs, but they are never complete songs and they are not already made up songs either. I think of them while I am pacing back and forth while things are xeroxing, I have my finger up to my mouth and my eyes are on the floor and there are these sounds running going through my head and then in between the music sounds I will be talking, talking in my head, not for real of course, I will be watching myself talking, as if I am talking to someone. And then come the sounds again, the music. Its wonderful music even though its so vague and I become disheartened that its only up there in my head. When I go down to the bathroom I try to sing some of the words, but it doesn't sound right because there must be something else in my head besides the words and the music, and I sing something about cracker ja a a x, but I sing it in a way that makes me think of early early mornings walking past a brick grocery store and the bread man is delivering bread to the grocery store. But then in a way it doesn't seem like this, it seems more like somewhere where there are a lot of trees and a secret man comes around from behind one of the trees, he is like a pear man but is not a man made of a pear, he is just a pear man. Anyhow, singing the words cracker jax does not have anything to do with cracker jax at all. Then when I open the door of the bathroom and am getting ready to stop singing I notice there are two people standing right outside the door and I wonder if they heard me singing and I feel a little funny as I say excuse me, but they don't giggle or anything, so I suppose they didn't hear me. I come back up here, and Peter, who is the chairman of the department, shouts out from his office next door "LINDA DO YOU HEAR THAT SOUND, QUICK QUICK ITS THE HAWKS". That's because he watches these two hawks that fly around the quad outside, and keeps track of them. He will write HAWK 11:35 a.m. or whatever time it is on his calendar when he sees one. So today he has told me that whenever I hear that sound I will know its a hawk. So I watch the hawk from my window like I watch a lot of things from my window, I watch and I think of another song. Its not about hawks, but it probably has something to do with them.

Linda Day

IT'S KIND OF LIKE BEING THE CATCHER IN THE RYE, working in a shelter for the homeless. You're there, kind of on the edge, and trying to see that nobody falls off. One thing that you learn fairly soon though, is that there is no true edge, and some of these cats have been falling for years. Of course that's encouraging, too, to a middle class white boy like me, to see that there is no true rock bottom, that there's always hope, etcetera. There is no real "and then you die" point, but as one older sheltercat pointed out, the older you get and the farther you go, the less energy you have (and o'course the more it takes) to get back up there. I worked as the part-time "advocate" at the Simpson Shelter, on 28th and Nicollet, in South Minneapolis, from October 15 until April 15, 1985-86, three times a week or more, including buying groceries for the place. It was the best job I ever had and I liked it a lot. I got paid \$100 a week. At the time I was also doing about forty hours a week at a bookstore (magazines, baseball cards, comic books, and porn). I did real well financially that winter. The people we sheltered were albies, fuck-ups, crazies, and a few people who just had plain bad luck. Mostly men, though a few women. Not many people actually wanted to be there, but it wasn't always a sad dismal horrible place. There is always something you can laugh about. It would be deadening, not to mention stupid and wrong, to go in there every night with this "Oh the poor homeless" head. Basically, we worked with what we had. You just have to get your parameters set, I guess. So, at 6:30 each night we would let everyone in, get them signed in, then they would choose a mat on this gymnasium floor in the basement of Simpson United Methodist Church. Our official capacity was thirty, but towards the end of the month when everyone had spent their GA checks, or it was so bitterly cold out, we take in as many as 40. At 7:30 or thereabouts we'd bring out sandwiches made by various Methodist Ladies' Auxiliaries; usually cheese but sometimes we'd get meat. No one ever wanted peanut butter and jelly, which was all the Catholic Charities ever had. We'd try to put out two sandwiches per person. In the winter guys would go dumpster diving and we would eat pizza, McDonald's, or Kentucky Fried Chicken. The director forbade us using the ovens to heat these things, citing Board of Health regulations. So we heated them on the space heaters. Besides sandwiches we'd try to have fruit. I ended up buying bananas instead of apples; lots of the guys didn't have enough teeth to eat the apples. Then there was hot coffee, instant cocoa, and tea. The only guys who went for the tea were old Native Americans. Lights went out at 9:00. There was also a TV room, where you could watch TV all night if you wanted. On Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays you could sign up to take a shower. We would have volunteers stay all night. Often they were from churches in the 'burbs. They are a whole 'nother story in themselves. But most of their hearts were in the right place. The shifts went from 10-2 and 2-6. I got to stay all night if we didn't have two volunteers. Sitting there, at a desk with a little light over thirty people on mats on a floor, loud snoring, bad smells, and sometimes just a general air of defeat, four in the morning, thirty-three degrees below zero outside, it could get depressing and wierd and downright enraging over the whole damn mess as hell. You damn betcha I went through some existential crises along with everybody else (yeah well). Sometimes I'd be on the bicycle--Shelter, four hours sleep, bookstore, back to Shelter. But the winter passed pretty quickly like that. The air in the place would be right funky by morning. Lights went on at 6:00 and everyone was out into the cold cruel world by 7:00. We'd all watch the weather report. It holds a lot of interest if you're going to be out there on the street all day. Working at Simpson I took away knives and throwing stars, broke up fights, carried guys passed out from booze to their mats, and listened to a lot of stories; riding the trains, doing this or that while drunk, bullshit baloney stuff, and then too about finding jobs, trying to get their kids back from social services, gay prostitution, getting beat up by mom and dad... I made friends at the Shelter, too. The thing that appealed most about the Shelter was that it was such a basic need, and we were fulfilling it. That's important. And we didn't take away anyone's dignity; we did what we could. That has become a credo with me: We Should All Do What We Can. Here's three important qualities if you ever work, volunteer, or stay in a shelter: 1. Respect 2. Sense of Humor 3. Don't Take Yourself Too Seriously (especially if you're working or volunteering). Now I work at the Salvation Army Harbor Lights Center. It's a shelter and has a chemical dependency program too. I've only been there a couple of weeks, though...

---W. Joe Hoppe (Simpson Red)

My name is PJK. I worked for Smith Barney for two years; rather, I should say, I am still employed by them at this writing, but am separating from them. I got my job totally by accident. Headhunters love me. They see dollar signs when they see my resume. I don't make much effort to look the corporate part, but I have college up my ass and will do anything from the lowliest of word-processing (I type 100 wpm and am literate in nine computer languages) to the highest-level of analytical-type work Wall Street has to offer. I got into Wall Street cuz I'm a hustler and I saw six years ago all the money those people were stealing and I thought, "I want a slice."

I got my slice in investment banking, but that's another story.

I ended up at Smith Barney because a headhunter liked me and sure enough, Smith Barney hired me on the spot. My new boss almost wouldn't let me leave -- they wanted me to show up and start the next day. Of course, this is often a sign that the job has to be filled immediately because the company's a mess, but in this case, he wanted me to start next day cuz he's a bigshot junk bond analyst, and had no helper. He told me I was overqualified but that he'd consider himself fortunate to have me for a little while, doing analytical work at that low salary. (\$21,000 per year. Less than half what I was making at my previous job.) Turns out this guy was a really nice person and I respect him and like him a lot, and that's cool and rare, but the rest of the shit I saw at that company was mind-bending.

I didn't start the next day, by the way, cuz it was July and I had to hit the beach. You know, I had to party a little. Childish, but Sailors' Haven at Fire Island is really something.

Plus, I felt something weird was going to happen at Smith Barney. A hunch. I'm not a tan-freak, but I at least wanted to look kind of glamorous while I began to submerge myself in 56,000 prospectuses.

I was always getting in trouble for what I wore to work. I don't cut my hair and never learned how to put it up, so I didn't fit the image of women they wanted. Women are to be seen and not heard in this company. They couldn't actually fire me though, because 99% of my work outfit was corporate -- that is, I'd wear a grey flannel suit, a string of cultured pearls, nude panyhose, my beloved pair of \$400 Gucci loafers (laugh if you want -- I hate Gucci, but these loafers are so comfy and they've lasted four years and go with everything!) (besides, Henry Cabot Lodge, III bought 'em for me), but then I'd have my scraggly hair and funny, ugly glasses. I mean, really ugly glasses. '60s cat-glasses custom-tinted in an EXTREMELY unflattering shade of green. Stuff like that. Guess I just like to rile people up. I was always getting nasty Evil Eyes from the bigshots, and one day I was told my attire was "inappropriate," but they wouldn't say what specifically was wrong, so I went out (this is mid-town Manhattan, mind you) and

bought a completely new outfit in record time -- like, 20 minutes, cuz the stores are all downstairs, and just went back to my desk as if nothing had happened. When they demanded an explanation I wrote them a memo and said I'd purchased new clothing and hoped it met their rigorous standards. I don't know why, but this REALLY upset them! I think the thing that shook them is I think I actually only took 15 minutes, and this was at 10:15 in the morning. Like, when things happen FAST here, they freak out. They're all covered with cobwebs.

I had lots of fights with my employer, and some were really ugly but most were great fun. It's really cool when you get to know people who are high up in a big financial company like this, and they accept you and like your work and IT BUGS THE HELL OUT OF MANAGEMENT. I think I'll always be fighting. I like to irritate people. When I see there's a need for a shakeup, I am first to do the shakin'.

I organized all kinds of conspiracies. They hated me cuz they couldn't catch me in the act. Like, once, this big hotshot analyst (these guys make MILLIONS, mind you) wrote this really uncool memo about how his secretaries had all been cocaine addicts and that's why he'd had to fire 'em, and Personnel should lay off his back for using up so many secretaries! I got six people to photocopy this memo and send it around anonymously to hundreds of people in the firm and outside the firm, all AT THE FIRM'S expense. I send "news releases" to Ray Brady via rush messenger! (He's the CBS news correspondent.) This was before the big drug-testing shit and it must've really caused a stir! I sent copies to all his previous secretaries and all these other people, and a year later he left. Don't think I'm mean, this guy was a sadistic arrogant fuck and by sending this memo around to show everybody how indiscreet he was really screwed him. After the way I'd seen him talk to female subordinates, I decided it had to be done. It was scary, but fun.

I always picked a different group of "assasins," who always thought they'd come up with the destructive ideas, and I never told them about their predecessors. It was really fun to see what I could do! I know it's evil, but I liked to play my assasins against the corporation a lot. Everything there is done so shoddily anyway -- I've seen traders lose millions for the firm in a few minutes cuz they were hung over and mad at their bosses. I mean, you just pick up a phone on the trading floor and start hitting the keys! The touchtone phones are actually computer links to do block trades. One day I picked up some phones and pressed a bunch of buttons and then ran to a Telerate screen to watch the market plunge! I'll never know, but I may have caused a million shares of IBM to be sold that second or something. This became a big game and I enjoyed scrambling things in the trading department and stuff like that then running to a screen to see the market fluctuate. Maybe I did something -- I'll never know. It was funny cuz I'd ask traders if I could use their phones for a second then get the computer on the line and just pound my fist on all the keys!

We were always getting threatened with urinalysis. You know, Kidder Peabody did a spot-check on their Operations people a year and a half ago and 90% of 'em failed. Everyone's on drugs. You know, it's hard to work with drug addicts, but I'm against the testing cuz it made me really paranoid. I eat poppyseed bagels, take Advil, drink Earl Grey tea. Phooey!

Today I got into a big fight with my office manager cuz I had given two weeks' notice and wanted my exit interview with Personnel so I could complain about her. She dismissed me today on the pretense that I'd cleaned out my desk and mailed back some stuff that was too bulky for me to carry home -- and I'd put the packages in interoffice mail and it was causing the firm like five bucks. She couldn't fire me for this though. I was just excused and will be paid for the next few days and I'm sorry I wasn't fired cuz I could get unemployment. But she didn't want me to go to Personnel cuz six of my assasins just left and complained about her. She forgot to take back my i.d. card though so I'll have to go to Personnel to return it, and will get my two cents in then. I already started my new job last month and am quite relieved, and it caused a lot of dissent and hatred against the firm in my department, which is always fun. Plus, American Can bought Smith Barney last week, and all the old management is gonna be out the door in a flash. It's fun to see 'em run scared. I'm not really a mean person, but these people deserve all kinds of bad shit. I was happy to see all the subpoenas come in the past year cuz of the insider trading shit. Smith Barney does things the old-fashioned way, and that means they INVENTED insider trading. Watch the press!

Working in midtown Manhattan is usually pretty fucked-up. It's very expensive. It can be fun, though. I like to have champagne and eggs sent up from the deli for breakfast. I mean, delis will send you a bottle of champagne no problem, they do it all the time. I like to go to "21" and The Russian Tea Room and I have spent a lot, but it made me feel good.

The subways are hell though. It's weird seeing well-dressed people acting like 3-year olds. Sad and disturbing. You see some guy acting like a psycho on the train cuz it's crowded, then you see him in the cafeteria later at Lazard Freres, and he recognizes you and tries to duck, then you start repeating the sick riff he laid on all the poor slobs that morning in "the electric sewer," and it's fun to see the reaction. Today a well-dressed woman was freaking out on the train cuz she was taking up a lot of space and reading, and when the train started to fill up she started to twitch, babble, and shove people if they came too close to her! I said, "You know, if you save your money, some day you'll have enough to buy your very own train and you can ride all alone!" And she said, "Yeah, I'll see you sideways," whatever that means. I saw her today in Tiffany's and she was buying some expensive china and I stepped up real close to her and whispered in her ear in a stage-whisper, like, REAL close in her ear, "I'll see you sideways!" and she made this really funny sound! Then I said to her aloud, so the clerk could hear, "Mom, you've got to get back home. The doctor says you're still not ready to shop and do regular everyday stuff yet, and if you write another bad check the police say you're going to be on the NEWS!" The clerk looked at her real funny, with slitty eyes, and said, "Excuse me," taking the woman's check away, and I left and went to spend my lunch hour in the atrium at the IBM building and I wondered how their stock was doing and then I went and picked up my tranquilizers before going back to the office to get dismissed early for spending five dollars of the firm's money.

I've just completed a two-year stint as a case manager at a mental health center that helps severely mentally disabled folks. The ultimate function of this cog-job is to prevent rehospitalization of depressives, suicidals, schizophrenics, the wreckless, alienated and anxious. In doing this there are lots of theoretical modes of operation, lots of implied programmatic methods. Education in ways to do things this society requires of us---behaving right, managing house or apartment, interfacing with the store bank, or busline---it is assumed will allow the person to make it in the world and stay out of conflicts that often wind them up in the hospital. Being a CM is like being an educator---or a reverse missionary. Unlike a missionary who tries to re-educate a whole culture, a CM represents the whole culture and he tries to educate the "sick citizen". For the most part, its like these folks dont belong in this modern culture. Actually for the most part it is damn important that they act like us. If they don't they die either by specific hands (often their own) or by the collective Hands of Man. My whole experience as a CM has boiled down to making the fundamental decision how far to go in re-educating my clients. Since I dont agree that having a 9-5 job is all that great in the first place, or that hair must be combed, or that must be a bright, happy "beautiful human", I don't push these things.

That's why I enjoy working most with schizophrenics---because they need the most basic type of re-education: training in how to deal with the ins-and-outs of a bona fide physiological illness. With the non-schizs, the tactic is usually to re-construct their attitudes, lifestyles and values. And thats seditious, covert, fascistic element of social welfare work. My caseload consists of very few genuinely antisocial destructive individuals (the violent, and narcissitic) whose cognitive re-conditioning would be an actual boon to society. Aside from the schizs, most of my caseload is anxious or depressed folks who need to learn more to live with themselves than to live with society. To attempt to change their lifestyle violates my values. Sometimes I get subtle office flack for not trying to change the trivial things about my clients, like lack of a job when they don't need one or how they look or talk. The administration pushes nit-picking. Usually the hard work of the day treatment dandies winds up in vain because the folks don't really have an interest in becoming polished, neat little pillars of society.

What's an american job in social welfare like? Lots of paperwork, huge case-loads of sould coming at you with a whole multitude of big and small problems, lots of memos and policies, and banging your head against the very society you are supposedly serving. Often the client gets caught in the middle. Community mental health is big, powerful and it do either real good or real bad. The real good occurs when the cm relies less on the built-in cmh mechanism and more on unorthodox methods to help people. The bad is system that don't work, that disabled both the social worker and the client.

The pay-off in being a social welfare worker is won thru hard battles with the system, society as a whole and with yr own conscience. It's not an automatically rewarding business to be in. Lots of times it is as much a pain in the ass as working in a fibreglass factory. I'm moving on---going back to school to get my idealism back. One problem I want to tackle is this:

'In teaching the socially lost to treat others in amiable ways, aren't we just foisting some utopian ideal? If you teach folks to accept others, aren't you setting them up to be kicked in the face by the modern world, by the people who don't want to be treated with acceptance and just really want money? The society is sicker than my schizophrenic clientele. So how do I justify teaching them how to function in society? Am I not making them sicker? Ah, well...

xxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

American Job

Thirty years into it and back on dirt level. The horrible thing about unemployment is the process of self evaluation you have to undergo. Just what have you done in these thirty years! How may you help us, the grossly wealthy and undeserving, become more grossly wealthy while taking very little

for yourself? How can we, the corporate jailers, squeeze the remaining juices of productivity from the last ten...five... or perhaps very last year of your existance and use them to fuel our evil money machine? How adept are you at using up the majority of your time and energy at little tasks that mean nothing to you? How much humiliation can you take before collapsing in a sobbing heap of defeat? What kind of cog are you? In other words, are you marketable????????????????

Dear Prospective Employer,

I would very much like for you to consider me for enturment in your business. Here is my resume.

College; Kent State. During my course of study, I drank enormous amounts of alcohol, consumed countless drugs, stayed up days on end conversing on philosophy, politics, science, religion, art, music, girls, drugs, nihilism. I fell deeply in love twice and had my heart broken both times, but can look back upon the experiance warmly. I joined the radical group May 4th Coalition with whom I lived in a tent commune, was teargassed by police, dressed like a hippie and laughed a lot. I published two books (one of poetry) and started two magazines, both of which died out quickly because they stopped being fun to do. I learned to kayak and nearly died on the river.

Experiance: I once played trumpet so pretty that I made a girl in audience cry; she later made love to me.

I spent twenty four hours on L.S.D. mapping out the process of evolution from the point of pure energy through all states of matter and consciousness back to pure energy, but it didn't make any sense the next day.

I sat by my father's bedside 12 hours a day for a week as he withered away from cancer.

I hitch hiked to Boulder Colorado from Kent to attend the anniversary seminar of the publishing of On The Road at which Allen Ginsburg hit me on the head.

I wrecked a motorcycle on the expressway and got up and rode it home.

Work Experiance:

I cooked a million hamburgers, pumped a lot of gas, built some houses, got fired by assholes, fired allot of people because it was my job to be an asshole, got drunk for free sometimes. All the people who ate the hamburgers shit them out and needed more; all the cars ran out of gas again; all the houses eventually fell apart, I got other jobs, all the people I fired got other jobs. None of this means very much at all to me.

On second thought, I really don't think I can go through this again. I sure I would be of no real use to you in your quest for material possessions. I simply have no more energy. Please put a bullet in my worthless fucking brain, as I haven't the stamina to do it myself.

Very Sincerely,
Michael W. Baker